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Bosnia-Herzegovina not an extremist state

Anti-Bosniak statements deserve scrutiny

By Sven Alkalaj
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Recently, we have witnessed synchronized xenophobic attacks on Bosnian-Herzegovinian society, which not so long ago suffered mass murders, expulsions, mass rapes and imprisonment in concentration camps. On Feb. 9, your media published a piece, “Republika Srpska deserves independence,” based on an interview with Milorad Dodik, and on Feb. 10, you published Max Primorac’s commentary, “An Islamist state on NATO’s border?” These pieces contained claims portraying [Bosnia](#)-Herzegovina as increasingly extremist and unstable.

The malicious and inflammatory messages spread by Messrs. Dodik and Primorac are identical to the messages of Slobodan Milosevic, aka “The Butcher of the Balkans,” who orchestrated aggression against [Bosnia](#)-Herzegovina. Three decades ago, this resulted in more than 2 million refugees and more than 100,000 killed and culminated in the genocide committed by Serbs. Therefore, it is essential that such

public statements be examined with historical accuracy and moral clarity. It is also important to know who Milorad Dodik and Max Primorac are.

Mr. Dodik is a genocide denier who personally awarded medals to convicted war criminals responsible for the genocide in Srebrenica, [Bosnia](#)-Herzegovina. He identifies himself as a Chetnik, representing a paramilitary organization that sided with those responsible for the Holocaust during World War II. The Chetniks sent thousands of Jews, many from [Bosnia](#)-Herzegovina, to the Banjica and Staro Sajmiste concentration camps near Belgrade, where they were executed.

The Israeli Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, described Serbian Chetniks as follows: "As the Chetniks increased their cooperation with the Germans, their attitude toward the Jews in the areas under their control deteriorated, and they identified the Jews with the hated Communists. There were many instances of Chetniks murdering Jews or handing them over to the Germans." These are historical facts, and we encourage you to verify them. Did you know that a Jew cannot run for the presidency of [Bosnia](#)-Herzegovina? The constitutional amendments that would enable this were supported by Bosniak (Muslim) political representatives, while Mr. Dodik and his political partners from Republika Srpska voted against them.

Regarding Mr. Dodik's claims that churches have been converted into mosques, here is another historical fact: During the aggression on [Bosnia](#)-Herzegovina, the army of

Republika Srpska destroyed 534 mosques, while the Bosnian Croat army destroyed 80. At the same time, Bosniak Muslims protected churches and synagogues, so none was destroyed within territories under the control of legitimate Bosnian military forces.

Mr. Primorac, on the other hand, embraces the ideology of the Ustase movement, a Croatian fascist and ultranationalist organization responsible for the genocidal Independent State of Croatia during World War II. He promotes a vision of a “third entity” in [Bosnia](#)-Herzegovina named after Max Luburic, a notorious Nazi collaborator, that echoes the Ustasha’s violent historical agenda.

Mr. Primorac’s father, Misko Primorac, was an active member of the Croatian Liberation Movement, which continued the Ustasha legacy in exile and helped establish the Croatian Democratic Union in the 1990s. Although the sins of the father do not automatically dictate the son’s views, contemporary rhetoric that stigmatizes entire communities and selectively frames historical responsibility inevitably demands scrutiny.

Many Bosniaks risked their lives to protect Jewish neighbors from fascist persecution. They did the same during the latest war. Simplistic narratives that reduce Bosniaks to a purely religious identity — “Muslims” — ignore their recognition as a constitutionally acknowledged people and reinforce harmful stereotypes. Even more concerning was Mr. Primorac’s claim that [Bosnia’s](#) authorities decided to sell the Sarajevo Haggadah, which is a shameful lie. In fact, [Bosnia](#) has

preserved the Haggadah through war, occupation and genocide, safeguarding a symbol of interfaith heritage.

Messrs. Dodik and Primorac distort public understanding, inflame ethnic tensions and provide a platform for legitimizing discrimination. In a world still grappling with the legacy of the Holocaust and the Yugoslav wars, amplifying voices that align with genocidal ideologies is a moral failing.

Before publishing or quoting figures such as Messrs. Dodik or Primorac, their historical associations and ideological positions and the factual record of their public statements must be critically examined. History shows the dangers of complacency in the face of extremist narratives. [Bosnia](#)-Herzegovina, a nation that has survived aggression, genocide and ethnic cleansing, deserves to have its story told with accuracy and moral rigor. Those who seek to distort that story for political purposes should not be given legitimacy in the press or in policy discourse.

Mr. Dodik and Mr. Primorac promote ideologies that have led to mass atrocities, including the Holocaust. Their narratives demand scrutiny, and the media bear a responsibility to ensure that historical truth is never sacrificed to obscure political agendas.

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